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Problems of Indochina

(求真雜誌)

Note: The following article appeared in Ch'iu Chen Tsa Chih, "Seek the Truth", published in Shanghai 1 January 1947. The article was written by K'ANG Chun (康君, a penname). This magazine is reported to be sponsored by the Chinese Trotskyists.

The fighting between the French and Annamites seemed to have quieted down in the early part of 1946; but it has again flared up in consequence of the occupation of Langson and Haiphong by the French troops in the latter part of last month (November). On the same day that the Socialists were successful in forming a Government in Paris, Marius Moutot, French Minister of Colonies (who is himself a Socialist), flew to Indochina with d'Argenlieu, the French High Commissioner, in order to protect French interests. Reinforcements are now being rushed to Indochina from various parts of the French Empire, and fierce fighting is raging.

Being on the side of oppressed peoples, we are indignant at the imperialistic action of the Blum cabinet which called itself Socialist. And we are quite sympathetic with the Annamites, who are struggling for national independence.

France was badly defeated in World War II. During the war, the Vichy Government followed a policy of appeasement toward Japan, in order to maintain its control over Indochina. Nevertheless, the local French Government was replaced by a Japanese puppet government in March 1945.

In September 1945, with the assistance of the British Labor Government, the French recaptured Saigon. This resulted in open hostilities between France and the United Annamite Provisional Government (later called the Vietnam Republic), with Ho Chi Minh as its leader. World War II created immense difficulties for those nations which have colonial interests. Indochina, like India, Indonesia, and Burma, is utilizing this opportunity to rid itself of imperial oppression.

As the French forces under Leclerc were having difficulties in establishing a strong position in Indochina in a short time, the French Government signed a preliminary agreement with the Vietnam Republic on 6 March 1946. In this preliminary agreement, the French Government recognised the Vietnam Republic as a free country, and agreed that the people of Vietnam should decide the destiny of their nation.

The Annamites demanded that the French Government give assurance of Vietnam's complete independence and the withdrawal of French armed forces in Vietnam within five years. The French Government, however, was completely insincere, and negotiations came to a standstill (e.g., important positions, such as those of minister of foreign affairs, provincial chairmen, and other chief administrative officers, were to be filled by nominees of the French Government.) After half a year, a modus vivendi was signed, which Ho Chi Minh considered to be better than nothing, but which other Annamite leaders opposed. In this agreement, the French Government recognised the independence of Vietnam, and released the Annamite patriots who were under arrest.

The signing of this modus vivendi favored French interests; it simply gave d'Argenlieu time to prepare for the recovery of the lost colony,

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so as to maintain the economic interests of France and to revive her prestige in the opinion of her own people and the world. It is clear that the agreement is a mere formality. It does not give Vietnam true independence, but, on the contrary, gives rise to a series of troubles. The French communiques, in an effort to conceal the truth and to lay the blame on the Annamites, indicated that the present situation was caused by Annamite violations of the treaty. However, the report made by the American Institute of Pacific Relations was more reliable. It pointed out that "the French failed to carry out the provisions of the agreement of 6 March 1946. Although the French permitted autonomy in Tonkin, nevertheless up to the present time, the French control of political developments has had little consideration for the welfare of the people." (United Press, 15 December.) The following day, there appeared in the "Epoch Daily" (Shih Tai Jih Pao, 時代日報) (Comment: this is a Shanghai Chinese-language paper, owned by the Soviet Government.) an article entitled: "Parley between the French and the Vietnam Republic," which pointed out that the fighting at Langson and Haiphong resulted from a French attempt to establish customs administration and to control foreign trade, in violation of the Provisional Agreement.

Prior to this, the French had tried to separate Cochinchina from the Vietnam Republic, which was partly dependent on Cochinchina for food. It was hoped that starvation would force Vietnam to submit to the French. This was one of the reasons that fighting broke out at Haiphong and Hanoi. It then spread to Saigon, but was brought under control by the French in that area. Riots occurred in Tonkin and Chien P'u Chai (東浦寨). The fighting intensified, with the French using modern weapons which included Spitfires, bombers, tanks, and paratroops.

The Blum cabinet, which was supposed to be a Socialist one, met its decisive test on the first day of its formation. For the benefit of the French "Two Hundred Families", they could not resist violating the Constitution of the Fourth Republic, which provided for protection against oppression in the colonies. At the National Assembly, Blum reiterated Moutet's statement of policy: namely, that the Government would defend French rights, including her colonies. As a result of the debate in the National Assembly, it was decided that the Blum Government would back up d'Argenlieu's policies, and would send General Leclerc (an able General of World War II) to Indochina to assist d'Argenlieu. During the session of the Assembly, a budget of 41 billion francs was passed for the first three months of the ensuing year. This figure shows no reduction from that of the past year. This is because of the situation in Indochina.

Leaders of the Democratic Republic put restraint upon French people who protested against the Government's Indochina policy. A Reuter's dispatch from Paris, dated 7 Dec., quoted in the "Epoch Daily", states as follows: "French Trotskyites of the Fourth International planned to hold a mass-meeting here yesterday in protest against the fighting in Indochina, but were stopped by the police. Seventeen persons, who were distributing leaflets, were arrested."

Bidault's successor, a socialist, revealed himself as a servant of the capitalists on the first day that he assumed office. His "freedom, equality, and fraternity" were stained with the blood of colonial people.

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The Vietnam leaders were pursuing a mere scrap of paper - a treaty - at a time when the French were confronted with difficulties; this gave the French time to prepare an offensive. The Vietnam leaders considered the treaty a great success, and thought that from that time on peace would prevail. They even dissolved the Annamite Communist party, in an effort to please the French, and disseminated a remarkable propaganda of peace among the people. For this reason, the people were totally unprepared to cope with the situation. The leaders not only made concessions to the French from the very beginning, but also insisted on negotiating with the French, and even invited the French to send a delegation to Indochina at the very time the French were making preparations for an offensive. The Annamite delegation in Paris sent an open letter to Ho Chi Minh, asking him to adopt a strong policy for the preservation of Vietnamese rights. Ho Chi Minh, on the other hand, published an article praising Blum, and expressing his satisfaction over Blum's statement. This was the height of stupidity.

The situation is now deteriorating, and the Annamite leaders are not in a position to defend their country against the French imperialistic forces, who are much better equipped than they. At the same time, the French Socialist leaders have discovered that force alone cannot solve the problem of Indochina. This point was openly admitted by Blum. The only way to solve the problem is to withdraw d'Argenlieu and the French forces immediately, and to allow the people of Indochina to elect their own independent government. High handed pressure and treachery will only strengthen the Annamite opposition.

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